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Meeting of the 2012/13 Intersessional Panel of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The 2012/13 Intersessional Panel of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development met in Lima from 7 to 9 January 2013. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Peru and chaired by Miguel Palomino de la Gala, Chair of the Commission for the period 2012/13.

One of the themes of the meeting was the 2013 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, the focus of which will be "Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals". Under this theme, presentations were made by representatives of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, followed by discussions on key policy messages and recommendations to be delivered to the Council, as well as on regional challenges and priorities.

Key policy messages

The discussions held at the meeting, including those on the annual ministerial review, resulted in several key messages regarding the interface between science, technology and innovation, on the one hand, and development, on the other. Many of these messages also highlighted issues pertinent mainly, but not exclusively, to Latin America and the Caribbean. The key messages were as follows:

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- Investments in science and technology, and particularly information technology, have a positive impact on economic growth and social development. Science, technology and innovation offer solutions and options for overcoming development challenges, especially through "green" or low-carbon development strategies.
- Science and technology approaches can be used to avert climate change impacts. Countries should consider preparing an inventory of sources of greenhouse gas emissions and linking this inventory to a science and technology road map that proposes improvements in areas such as urbanization, transport, energy, waste management and deforestation.
- Local and traditional knowledge that builds on cultural values is crucial for the development of science and technology policies that address local issues.
- The development of appropriate modern infrastructure is essential to realizing the benefits of science, technology and innovation. Financing is a key element in this regard. New, innovative business models are needed to capitalize on available opportunities. One initiative mentioned was the Little Rock Accord signed by the Club de Madrid and the P-80 Group Foundation, which aims to link resources available through sovereign wealth and pension funds and other sources to viable projects.
- Greater urgency should be attached to the challenges created by a growing middle class and the pursuit of unsustainable consumption and production patterns. For many developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, population growth may be a less urgent concern than the issue of increasing consumption.
- There is a need to distinguish between high and low technology and their use in and application to particular contexts.
- Information and communications technology and broadband access should be seen as empowering science, technology and innovation. Public-private partnerships should be established to enable progress in both realms.
- Strong policy and regulatory frameworks are needed and the development of a culture of innovation should be encouraged through education. National development strategies, including broadband and spectrum allocation policies, should be elaborated.
- Internet literacy and the development of high-quality local content play a critical role in the penetration and use of broadband, in addition to the issue of infrastructure.

I. Introduction

1. In July 2013, the Economic and Social Council will hold its seventh annual ministerial review at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The focus of the review will be "Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals".

2. In preparation for the annual ministerial review, the 2012/13 Intersessional Panel of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development held a meeting on 9 January 2013 to discuss regional challenges and priorities relating mainly, but not exclusively, to Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which is responsible for the substantive servicing of the Commission, organized the meeting in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat.

4. The meeting brought together representatives of Commission member States and a diverse group of stakeholders from Governments, the private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system, to discuss the role of science, technology and innovation in promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It also provided an important opportunity for Commission member countries to contribute to the annual ministerial review and to exchange best practices and lessons learned.

II. Issues relating to science, technology and innovation for development

5. At each of its annual sessions, the Commission selects priority themes to be reviewed during the following intersessional period. At its fifteenth session, held in Geneva from 21 to 25 May 2012, the Commission chose two substantive themes for the 2012/13 intersessional period, namely, "Science, technology and innovation for sustainable cities and peri-urban communities" and "Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society". These priority themes were discussed at length during the meeting of the Commission's 2012/13 Intersessional Panel, with the participation of experts.

A. Science, technology and innovation for sustainable cities and peri-urban communities

6. Participants discussed the challenges that cities faced on their path towards sustainable urban development. Major challenges included unplanned urban growth and the need to prioritize the elaboration and implementation of effective strategies to improve urbanization processes. Issues relating to institutional capacity for serving new growth areas and problems such as pollution were major concerns in many developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean. Science, technology and innovation could help to solve those urban challenges by enhancing urban management, delivering better environmental outcomes, providing higher

resilience to natural risks, improving resource efficiency and creating new employment opportunities.

7. On the issue of sustainable mobility, experts highlighted the importance of enhancing public transportation, promoting bicycle use and improving pedestrian infrastructure and stressed the imperative to reduce travel needs, to shift towards more sustainable transportation models and to enhance energy efficiency.

8. Experts underlined the opportunities for science, technology and innovation to support urban and peri-urban farming. Greener cities could help to deal with problems resulting from rapid urbanization. Nevertheless, many countries still lacked legal and institutional frameworks for the integration of agriculture in urban areas and the provision of services and financing for small growers.

9. Experts also highlighted the role of public policy in fostering innovation ecosystems that built science, technology and innovation capacity for sustainable urbanization. The sustainable development paradigm required new approaches to meeting basic needs. Both high and low technologies needed to be integrated into a working system of solutions. Innovation ecosystems should ensure that technology moved from inventors to beneficiaries. New financing models were important in order to deploy available technologies. For example, the Little Rock Accord signed by the Club de Madrid and the P-80 Group Foundation in December 2012 aimed to mobilize pension and sovereign wealth funds for investment into technologies that addressed climate change and resource shortages.

B. Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society

10. Participants underscored that broadband access was of great importance for development, especially in sectors such as education, health, agriculture, finance/banking, e-Government and local entrepreneurship. There were challenges and gaps to be overcome in order for the benefits of broadband and information and communications technology (ICT) to become a reality. Despite tremendous improvements, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in access to mobile phones, it was noted that broadband access was still lagging owing to the gap in mobile broadband penetration in the region. Experts argued that the digital divide in the region in terms of access, penetration and use was becoming wider. Participants identified key action areas for continued development of broadband access, including increased Government commitment, improved regulatory frameworks promoting competition and investment and coordinated demand strategies so that consumers could adopt and benefit from broadband access.

11. Participants saw broadband as a major tool for an inclusive world, reducing inequalities and improving access to health care and information. Despite the benefits of broadband, many countries struggled with its high cost. Therefore, there was a need to bridge the gap in access and affordability at both the regional and the country levels.

III. Follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society, including preparations for the sixteenth session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development

12. Participants reviewed the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. It was emphasized that the Summit helped to maintain the multi-stakeholder nature of Internet governance discussions. Participants reported on and assessed their own efforts towards implementation of the Summit outcomes. They also shared their plans for achieving the targets set out in the plan of action for the 10-year review of implementation of the outcomes of the Summit, which provided Summit stakeholders with both guidance and a vision for the way beyond 2015.

13. The World Summit on the Information Society Forum, launched in 2006 in follow-up to the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society and organized by the International Telecommunication Union in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Programme, provided a mechanism for evaluating and rewarding stakeholder efforts to implement the Summit outcomes. Reference was made to the report *Measuring the Information Society 2012*, which delivered two authoritative benchmarking tools for monitoring information society developments worldwide: the ICT Development Index, which ranked countries' performance with regard to ICT infrastructure and uptake, and the ICT Price Basket, which tracked and compared the cost and affordability of ICT services.

14. Both the ICT Development Index and the ICT Price Basket were powerful measures for benchmarking and explaining differences among countries and within regions when it came to ICT developments.

15. It was noted that significant progress had been made in terms of ICT statistical production, although there were still deficits in conceptual and methodological references. It was stated that developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, could contribute to and benefit from the 10-year review process in two ways: by conducting an assessment of their progress towards meeting Summit targets; and by providing a regional approach to the prospects and future challenges of the information society.

IV. 2013 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council

16. Vijaya Kumar, Chair of the Industrial Technology Institute of Sri Lanka and member of the Commission, informed participants that science, technology and innovation could help: (a) to raise life expectancy from 50 to 64 years of age; (b) to reduce infant mortality from 13 to 6 per cent; (c) to improve access to safe water from 35 to 65 per cent; (d) to raise the literacy rate from less than 50 to 70 per cent; and (e) to improve living standards for billions of people. Country competitiveness based solely on low labour costs was ultimately unsustainable and would soon vanish. As such, an alternative paradigm of country development was being used to find ways in which science and technology infrastructures and relevant policy initiatives could foster sustainable economic growth.

17. He said that poverty reduction strategies should focus more on rural and urban productivity, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, environmental sustainability, as well as on science, technology and innovation. Real development progress had not reached the most vulnerable, considering that the poorest children were still experiencing the slowest progress in improved nutrition and that the opportunities for full and productive employment for women were still scarce. Science, technology and innovation had more potential to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Commission had recommended targeting of 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development-related spending, but only a few developing countries were able to do so, with most giving low priority to investment in science, technology and innovation. That was unsurprising given the low human capacity in science, technology and innovation in developing countries and the fact that those countries could not enjoy immediate returns on their investments. The main achievements in ICT were principally in mobile telephony, driven by the private sector, and in the Internet penetration rate, which had reached 21 per cent in developing countries. In his view, the United Nations needed to focus its science, technology and innovation interventions on improving capacity to absorb technology, enhancing employment in the manufacturing industry and improving agricultural productivity of certain crops.

18. Mario Castillo, Project Coordinator, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, made a presentation entitled "Science, technology and innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean". In his presentation, he noted that the region had enjoyed nearly a decade of relatively high growth, that inflation was under control in nearly all countries and that, in general, stable economic conditions prevailed. Despite that improvement, the gap in science, technology and innovation between developed countries and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to be significant. Specifically, he emphasized the low levels of innovation in the region and the persistence of the productivity gap compared with developed countries. The current patterns of economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean were not consistent with sustainable development. In the current context, natural resource governance was key to achieving sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The magnitude of the effort to move towards a more sustainable development path implied significant modifications in the current patterns of production, consumption and distribution, the technological paradigm and the existing relative price structure.

19. Neil Pierre, Chief, Policy Coordination Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said that the Commission was meeting at a crucial time for the Council, as the focus of the Commission's deliberations related directly to the theme of the Council's 2013 annual ministerial review, namely "Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals". Moreover, the timing of the meeting marked the commencement of the General Assembly's work on elaborating a set of sustainable development goals and coincided with significant advancement in the preparations for a post-2015 United Nations development agenda. Superimposing those major concurrent initiatives was the intergovernmental focus on strengthening the Council itself. The key policy messages and recommendations from the meeting would be transmitted to the Council's substantive session in July. The main messages coming out of the deliberations, together with those coming out of other regional consultations, would be incorporated into the report of the

Secretary-General on the annual ministerial review, to be presented to the Council at its substantive session in July. Additionally, the Secretary-General has been requested to submit a thematic report, also for discussion in July, on the Council's contributions to the post-2015 development agenda. There, too, the contributions of the Commission would be valuable. Mainstreaming science, technology and innovation into the proposed sustainable development goals and post-2015 development framework would be critical to integrating the three elements of sustainable development. Economic, social and environmental policies were closely intertwined with science, technology and innovation systems, which should be seen both as a means of implementing any agreed development framework and as central elements of such a framework. Science and technology had a crucial role to play in informing people's understanding of the mechanisms of sustainable development, in developing options for sustainable growth and in facilitating the adoption of evidence-based practices, he concluded.

20. The various presentations made and discussions held during the meeting formed a backdrop to discussions on the 2013 annual ministerial review. The deliberations helped to identify some policy messages from developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, that could be relevant to the theme of the annual ministerial review during the global review of progress in science, technology and innovation and culture in July 2013. In particular, during the discussion on the priority theme "Science, technology and innovation for sustainable cities and peri-urban communities" participants explored issues related to science, technology and innovation and sustainable development in the context of promoting clean energy. During the discussion on the priority theme "Internet broadband for an inclusive digital society", meanwhile, participants focused on how sectoral dimensions of science, technology and innovation (in this case, ICT) could be better integrated so as to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

V. Conclusions

21. Across the developing world, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, challenges remain, such as the need for sustained efforts in innovation and technological development, a pronounced digital divide, relatively low access to broadband in terms of affordability and availability and heterogeneity in terms of broadband infrastructure investment, with consequences for achieving inclusive societies. The main conclusions and recommendations of the 2012/13 Intersessional Panel are as follows:

(a) Latin America and the Caribbean exhibits increased economic, social and political stability and good overall economic performance. General projections for the region are very good as it continues to enjoy increased social partnerships and social dialogue and lower levels of unemployment;

(b) Despite these positive trends, there is a high degree of inequality across the developing world, including in Latin America and the Caribbean. Education quality and access is also uneven. While foreign direct investment levels have risen in recent years, there are low levels of technology absorption, technological inputs in exports and labour productivity;

(c) To offset some of these challenges, policies should be implemented to strengthen the links between low-productivity sectors and sectors that are at the

technological frontier in many developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean. Greater incentives should be considered to channel foreign direct investment into increasing labour productivity and technological absorption;

(d) Developing countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, should increase their investment in research and development, which currently averages 1 per cent of GDP, in order to enhance innovation and to capitalize on its economic and social benefits;

(e) Public policy and regulation should be geared towards increasing investment in education and digital literacy. In addition, ICT regulatory and strategic planning and visioning frameworks should be established or strengthened, where necessary.